THE WIDER SWADESHI MOVEMENT

B. P. WADIA

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BY

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IT is dawn. Divine Ushas clad in purest white is unlocking heaven's golden gate.

It is our National sandhya-kalam. Our birds are singing their pæans of praise ; our buds are blossoming into fragrance and glory ; our men and women are immersed in tapas aiming at emancipation. Silence envelops all.

Angels sing with the birds ; fairies weave fragrance into colour ; rishis bless our human-kind. Shri Krishna's flute makes music divine, heard and responded to by all.

Life within bird and beast and man has been experiencing divine discontent and is bent upon fuller self-expression. The children of Bharat Mata are breaking the fetters of dependence and are manifesting the powers of their souls. They are making a New Heaven on this old earth. The birth of New India is upon us.

Shri Krishna plays His flute and calls us to sacred task and holy labour. Five thousand years He has been playing His Divine Tune, putting His children to sleep—receding, receding all the while. Going away from here, in the guise of Orpheus, of Christ, of Muhammad, He has aroused His people of many climes to come to His ancient land. And at length he has returned to wake us up from our age-long slumber. He left us as He left Radha ; He went away from us as He departed from Mathura to Dwarka. But He was helping others when Radha was left alone ; He was reigning in Dwarka when Mathura was desolate without Him. For five thousand years thus, and now He has come unto His own.

That, my Brothers, is how I would symbolise for you the life-movement all around us. In these bustling days of political struggle, when the awakening of National Consciousness is so much talked about, I feel that I shall be discharging my duty best by placing before you a few thoughts about certain aspects of

our National Life. They may not be deemed of great importance by some at this time, but I believe that the great National Regeneration of our peoples is many-sided, and for a Literary Union like yours, it would be well to consider aspects other than the political one, which is occupying our attention so much. A Nation cannot regenerate itself by politics only, as a man cannot live by food alone. Moral and intellectual growth, religious and artistic unfoldment are necessary for the awakened Self of man, and there are aspects of National Consciousness which need to be attended to. The political aspect is only one aspect of our consciousness, and by no means the most important. For the unfoldment and proper manifestation of other aspects, literary, artistic, scientific, religious, it is essential that our political emancipation should receive our chief attention. But he would be an unwise youth who only paid attention to the development of one set of muscles, or one particular organ or limb of the body, to the neglect of others and with inattention towards them.

It is necessary to realise first that the awakened consciousness of the Indian people is

not only in its political aspect. We should recognise that there are certain other aspects of the soul of Bharat Mata which are manifesting life, movement, power. I would like you to ponder over my suggestion that our political awakening is but a part, howsoever important, of a greater National awakening. There is a new life making manifest new powers. There has been a great change ; there have been birth-throes of a significant character. The political agitation, which followed the birth of political aspirations, because of its innate nature, may leap to the eye and permeate our thoughts and affect our daily lives. But there are other aspects of our unfolding National Consciousness which influence us, as they do even that political outlook and aspiration and agitation. All of us may not be aware of the process ; it may not be so very patent ; but it still is there, and I have ventured to make an effort to refer to these aspects of National Consciousness and discourse on them, not with a view to illuminate the subject, for that I feel incapable of doing, but to provoke thought, quiet reflection and as quiet discussion, so that we may all gain the

illumination for the benefit of our Motherland. Then there are aspects of our National Consciousness, which are not awakened to that extent, which need our attention. To nurture the seeds of future National well-being is not only necessary, but important. I wish to place before you a few thoughts thereon, so that in a Union like yours, you may study them, ponder over them and give to the country the advantages of your deliberations and work.

Spiritual Awakening

First let me remind you that the National awakening is of a spiritual nature. Religion colours everything in India ; it is the key-note of all activities. But there is a spiritual tone, as there is a material tone of religion. Materialistic religion is not unknown here as elsewhere. But what we find at the present time is a spiritual awakening, and not only religious. Lock how it affects all castes, all creeds, all faiths, all religions ; how it touches our heads and our hearts and our hands ; how it influences men as well as women ; how it

changes the young as also the old ; how it has reached the raiyat in his village, and the trader in his town. Its universality is one great sign of its spiritual character. From this point of view one cannot but welcome most heartily the expressions of demand, of prayer, of request, as also of agitation, some wise, others unwise, on the part of all communities and classes. Varied and many interests, some unselfish, others selfish, some reasonable, others absurd, are clamouring, clamouring, clamouring. But the good sign of it all is this, that each has found a voice. The children of the Motherland live and move and have their being in her consciousness and the awakened Spirit of Bharat Mata has touched all her children and is producing before our eyes, now and here, a spiritual transformation. Contrast this with the intellectual awakening of our Nation which followed in the wake of the introduction of western liberal education in this country. Or again contrast it with the martial awakening which sprang from the religious evolution of the tenets of the spiritual Guru Nanak. This is not an intellectual or religious awakening; this is a spiritual

awakening which affects our religious feelings and intelligence and morals—our whole being. What does this imply? This, that our Indian Nation has realised—maybe it is not conscious of it yet—that like other great nations of the world, it also has a message to give to Humanity, a message different from that of any other people. After the passing of a very long time our Indian Nation has once again come to the realisation of its own inner life, the presence of its own Ego, who has a mission to fulfil. The spirit of the Nation, after a long sleep, has awakened and wants to fulfil its duty, its dharma.

VIDESHI

You will perceive the truth of what I am asserting if you will take note of the fact that there is a general dislike on the part of our people for foreign, or videshi, things, as well as ideas, and unfortunately—though one must acknowledge it is inevitable—persons. The nation finds itself fettered by chains of foreign make—foreign language, foreign dress or articles of dress, foreign methods of administration, and even foreign ideals. Business life is

permeated by foreign ways and methods; home life has deteriorated through foreign influences. A foreign education is turning out youths, foreign in their outlook and their views. Foreign literature is stamping our brains with foreign ideas. In the midst of all this the Soul of India has suffered: retiring into silence and darkness it has been weeping its wail of suffering and isolation—isolation from its peoples, its gardens, its houses, its law courts, its schools, its colleges, its libraries, its marts —aye even its temples.

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Now, our awakened National Consciousness, because of the spiritual nature of the awakening, wants to bring out its own inherent powers which will enable the Motherland to give to the world her own special message, to fulfil in the interests of the race as a whole, its own special mission. Hence this first sign of deep dislike, which is fast spreading everywhere—thanks to the Gods for it—of everything foreign. It appears to me that it is the first legitimate outcome of the spiritual awakening.

I like to name it the Wider Swadeshi Movement. Since the days of the Bengal Partition we have heard the noble cry of Swadeshism. It is generally meant to be only of an economic character. However, of late the spirit of Swadeshism has coloured other walks of life. It is no more a matter of dressing in Swadeshi style, or buying Swadeshi goods ; it is now speaking Swadeshi language, living in Swadeshi homes in Swadeshi style, surrounded by Swadeshi objects of art or utility ; it is now Swadeshi education, Swadeshi drama, Swadeshi music, Swadeshi craft. In fact, we are fast acquiring—praise be to Ishwara—a Swadeshi outlook. Certain factors of this Swadeshi Movement have imparted a new vitality to our political work, which has made our recent agitation so irresistible and successful. Those factors have brought together in close contact our western educated classes and the masses, illiterate but not uncultured. Those factors have bridged a gulf, the crossing of which would otherwise have taken long years. Those very factors are opening out new and wonderful fields before us to be ploughed and sown in the near future. The

movement of the masses is being ensured by the educated classes moving among them, speaking their tongue, sympathising with their poverty and misery and learning from them simple but deep truths of a spiritual nature. A kind of yoga between the intellect of India and the labour of India is being attained, a union fraught with promise, the first step of the fulfilment thereof being in our political emancipation.

PASSIVE RESISTANCE

The spiritual nature of the awakening is also to be seen in the spirit of sacrifice which is in evidence. The ideals of Passive Resistance so much approved of by the general public during recent months are permeated through and through by the spirit of sacrifice. Our people were willing to suffer for the good of the Cause—suffer without actively retaliating, suffer leaving the result of their passivity to the devas and rishis and the Lords of Karma. The evidence of that spirit, the enthusiasm and the readiness with which people took up Passive Resistance principles, awaiting the

word of command to practise it, also proves the spiritual nature of the present National awakening. The same spirit of sacrifice which the Brahmanas of this Presidency have evinced in our hour of test, by showing the willingness to give up what was said to be in their power and possession, is another instance, and I can give more, of the general spiritual awakening.

VERNACULARS

This Wider Swadeshi Movement, active in its nature on the one side, and the Passive Resistance, embodying the principles of self-surrender on the other, are aspects of our awakened National Consciousness which are not fully recognised by the large majority of our people or by the Government. It is essential that you should study the subject, understand it in all its phases, and help the movement, not merely by a theoretical understanding, but by a practical and everyday living. That these aspects of our awakened consciousness belong to the coming age is clear from the fact that the effects thereof are mostly to be found in the

midst of Young India. The Wider Swadeshi Movement and the Passive Resistance Movement are sweeping over Young India, though the latter may not be conscious of it. See how our youths are rightly claiming to use National dress, when the fathers of many of them are going about in ugly European costume. More elsewhere than in this Presidency is to be found the enthusiasm and the earnestness for conversing or lecturing in vernaculars.

The Vernacular Movement is spreading fast. Let us hope our Madras people will follow the noble example of Gujerati, Marathi, Hindi and Bengala speaking countrymen of ours and enforce more and more, the use of the vernaculars in the home, in correspondence, in club. If I had been familiar with Tamil, I certainly would have used that language, and I must crave pardon of my audience for using a foreign tongue, being myself a foreigner in this Tamil land.

An Argument for Home Rule

And that brings me to those other aspects of our National Consciousness which are not yet

awakened to the same depth as the ones I have been alluding to above. The development of the vernacular part of the Wider Swadeshi Movement has touched and will arouse to full working order the literary and artistic consciousness of our people. We are videshi in procuring our intellectual and artistic food as we are videshi in purchasing foreign articles of everyday use in this commercial age. In the unfoldment of the literary and artistic consciousness of our Indian Nation, a Union like yours should play an important part. I will admit at the outset that the miserably poor and altogether faulty education imparted to our young men, deserves a great share of the blame which must be poured on the absence of real and widespread expressions of the literary and artistic aspects of our soul. We ourselves, as well as our friends and foes of other lands, have complained of the paucity of literary and artistic output of the Indian people. In the depths of our National Soul, layers of these aspects of Consciousness abide ; therein lie latent powers, wonderful, almost magical, which under suitable environment will burst forth into music. Of that I have no doubt. In this, as

in the matter of our political emancipation, if we have to wait till the seeds of foreign knowledge and culture sown into the soil of our National life sprout forth and grow and flower, we will have to wait for wellnigh a century. At the end of it we should have committed National suicide ; for then the *Indian* will be no more, and a poor imitation of western institutions is all that would survive in this country. If Home Rule is not to be gained by us till the peasant in his field and the raiyat in his village have acquired the knowledge of the English language, and all that goes with it, then as a Nation we are doomed. But if Home Rule can be gained, and it ought to be and must be now, so that the Indian soul of the Indian people, not yet dead, but only lying dormant, may get a chance to express itself through the languages of the country, and by the full restoration of institutions truly National, then India will surely be able to benefit the whole world. Thus to me Home Rule is not a question of mere political freedom and gaining of political power with opportunities for the introduction of right systems of education, trade and industries, but is the question of all questions

—the saving of our own soul, for our own good, but also for the greater good of the wider world.

VERNACULARS AND SAMSKRIT

Now, in the development of Indian literature along truly National lines, our vernaculars can and will play a very important part. The metaphysics and philosophy and soul-culture of our people, inherited from our glorious forefathers, will find in our vernaculars proper and happy media of expression. In no foreign tongue, including English, can the subtleties of our National Consciousness attain full expression. Language and speech are highly important concomitants of individual as well as racial and national culture-expression. The soul dwelling in a particular body, belonging to a particular country or race or even family, always finds the most adequate instrument of manifestation for itself in the use of all the belongings, hereditary and environmental, of that body. Thus the soul of a poet inhabiting a body, say in this city, belonging to a family here, will find Tamil to be the most adequate

instrument of expression for his poetry. That is why the poems and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore cannot be fully appreciated and grasped by us, unless we read in the original Bengala, the outpourings of his Bengala soul. Shakespeare read in French is different from Shakespeare read in English; the French culture of Anatole France or the German culture of Heinrich Heine can only really be appreciated by us if we study them in original French or German. The potency of the mother-tongue is mysterious, and the literary renaissance of our Nation will best be achieved by our insistence on the continuous and regular use of our vernaculars. It is sometimes argued that our vernaculars are not rich enough to enable us to write prose or poetry with that advantage which the English language affords; it is said that these vernaculars do not lend themselves to dramatic writing. Any student of our religious lore will tell you that it is very difficult to render into English the subtleties of metaphysical and philosophic concepts with which our sacred books bristle. The Soul of Mother India is not going to express cheap truths for a commercial

age to be sold in competitive markets. She will need words and phrases for expressing the subtleties of her spiritual nature. Her mission is to teach to the world spiritual truths, which she alone can teach. Her literary output, her artistic creations will be manifestations of her innate spirituality. And what better tongue than Samskrit, the Deva Bhasha, can afford the scope to her geniuses for imparting to her children the truths of mysticism and metaphysics, of psychology and philosophy? And are not most of our vernaculars derived from that self-same Samskrit, beloved of the Gods?

Literary Awakening

Now the development of our literary consciousness will be twofold. First, we will see the growth of vernacular literature, in and through which our National Soul will pour out her hopes and fears, aspirations and realisations. Secondly, we will see the growth of literary talent making use, more and more of the English language for the benefit of the western world. Already we

perceive that the world would be poorer to-day if the poems of Rabindranath or the stories of Bankim Chandra Chatterji were not translated from Bengala into English. The world is so much the poorer to-day because the poems of Malabari remain enshrined only in the language of rural Gujarat. And the same may be said of some of the exquisite writers of Hindi songs in the United Provinces and elsewhere. The work of Toru Dutt or Srimati Sarojini indicate what Indians, and what is more, Indian women, can do even in handling a foreign language. The vernacular and English writings are but the herald of the coming dawn.

Now our duty is to help in the awakening of that layer of our National Soul which pertains to literature. I need only draw attention very roughly, in broad outlines, to those things which we need to watch and improve. To begin with our journalism, the quick newspaper work or the production of more refined reviews and magazines is in its infancy. The literary side of the latter is poor, of the former poorer still. Essay writing is only beginning, if we take into account its serious side. These

same branches in the vernacular department are of course a little better, but by no means satisfactory. Drama fortunately has attained a better status in the vernaculars, but has hardly any in English. Poetry shares the same fate, and story-telling and novel-writing also. Our best literature belongs to a far-off past, but I see signs of a literary renaissance in the years that lie immediately in front.

There is, it seems to me, a great need for some such institution as the Authors' Club in our capital towns where writers—essayists and poets and playwrights and novelists and journalists—may find a common platform of interest and for discussion. In the city of Madras the well-known dramatic institution—the Saguna Vilasa Sabha—is rendering most excellent service by staging in vernacular and in English admirable dramas, and if it could be persuaded to open a department or branch for authors, as I now suggest, it would enhance its usefulness considerably, and more, also help in this noble work of further and fully awakening the literary consciousness of our Presidency.

PUBLISHING AND BOOK-SELLING

In this connection I would like to refer to the want of adequate publishing facilities. Besides a few honourable exceptions, like Messrs. G. A. Natesan & Co., of Madras, the whole publishing work is going on in a very haphazard manner. Sometimes I dread to imagine untold literary wealth sunk down and down to dust and ashes, as authors die, authors who have been their own publishers, authors whose good work remained unknown, authors who could not or did not use the art of advertisement. I myself know several such cases. Our young men often go in search of employment; here is a most interesting field of labour. With small capital, a man of ordinary ability and business capacity can earn his livelihood and also serve his Motherland. Then there is the counterpart of publishing—the book-selling trade. It is in a decidedly better condition than the publishing, but here also we need more men with some capital and knowledge. But let me pass on from this prosaic business talk to the poetic arts—and yet not before I urge on your Union to interest

itself in this matter, and investigate and study the problem, for remember, friends, that the publishing and book-selling concerns of a nation are indices to its intellectual and moral evolution.

The Fine Arts

And now to the arts. Nothing builds up national morality, and removes ugliness and vice from the corporate life of society as the influence which the arts exert over us. Architecture, sculpture, painting and music are the chief component organs that make up the body of the Goddess of Beauty. In ancient as well as mediæval India, these arts flourished, and fortunately they still survive. They will breathe life into dying and decaying forms which persist in mouldering temples, in limbless statuary, in fading pictures, in misunderstood music, and in misinterpreted dancing. The wine of western education made us scoffers at our religions and our arts, but sanity is returning to us in the small hours of the morning as the effects of drunkenness are wearing themselves out. When the day of

National Regeneration dawns, we will not fail, I am sure, to award their proper places to the arts of our fathers and fore-fathers.

THE BENGAL SCHOOL

While on the subject, I cannot refrain from mentioning the most admirable work which is being done by a few of our Bengali brothers through the Indian Society of Oriental Art. The paintings and drawings they have been putting before the public in recent years are of exquisite nature, and what is more they are national, not only in subject but also in technique. What I have been saying in reference to literature, that it will be sounding a spiritual note because it is produced in India, can also be said of Indian art, in all its departments. I will quote an authority on the subject; O.C. Gangoly is an important and recognised exponent of the Indian School of Art, and writing in the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, he says:

> Indian art has never nourished itself on the husk of the senses and the life of the body. It has

worked with a deeper motive and a profounder suggestion, seeking to wean the human mind from the obvious and the external reality of the senses, disdaining to imitate nature and striving to find significative forms to suggest the formless infinity which is hidden behind the physical world of forms. In order to suggest and depict this world of "ideality" the Indian artists have been led to devise certain conventions, chiefly in the method of the treatment of the human anatomy, which have led some critics to assert that the Indian genius in art is essentially unplastic and that his special system of artistic anatomy has been the outcome of incompetence rather than of intent.

It is this "world of Ideality" which India, through her literature and art, will make manifest to our earth. I am tempted to write at some length on this topic of Indian art, but I must be content with making a suggestion only. The Indian Society of Oriental Art has with care and ability published beautiful reproductions of some of these pictures, and it has cost the Society a fair amount. Our immediate duty is to popularise these pictures by an adequate use of these reproductions. They are not prohibitive in cost, and I would appeal to all to purchase them, and to display them in every public institution. Your Union may well take up this work during the coming year.

MUSIC

I am also aware of some movement for the creation of a school of Indian music. In Bombay the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya promises to do in music what the Bengal school have already done in painting. The movement is still in its infancy and will require a great deal of care and attention. Here also you can lend a helping hand by establishing, as a branch of your Union, a music department where *real* Indian music is studied. I do not mean music of the kind which goes plentifully round in these days with the uncouth, ugly sounding, foreign harmonium, but the musical culture of India has to be brought to the front, and I understand Tamil music has a value and charm all its own.

But let me not keep you long over the details. All I want to reiterate is the fact that in the delivering of her spiritual message to the world, India will need the help of her literary and artistic culture. In her soul poesy and art dwell, and signs are not wanting to reveal that in the general spiritual awakening

of our Nation, the layers of consciousness, literary and artistic, are unfolding. These aspects of our National Consciousness have to be provided with nourishment.

Value of Foreign Ideals

There is one point I would like to touch before I close. In my earnestness to impress on you the necessity for the immediate realisation of ideals pertaining to the Wider Swadeshi, I have insisted on our shunning videshi ideas and objects. It is not out of hatred for things foreign that I have done so, but because of my strong belief that in the immediate future our National emancipation, including the political, depends on the principles of Swadeshism and self-sacrifice. The harmonious growth of our literature and art will result from these principles. Our National Consciousness will pour out its music, will display its colours, will reveal its strength of curve and contour mainly through the spiritual medium of Swadeshism and renunciation. The study and appreciation of foreign literatures and arts, the understanding of foreign civilisations, the

proper grasp of ideas underlying living foreign movements are very essential. Our young men and young women are often narrow in their intellectual views, because to most of them literature means English literature, and even then, only certain known authors and poets. The idealism of France, the philosophy of Germany, the religious outlook of Russia, the strange points of view of the new world of America are taken scant notice of. For the growth of our own literary and artistic soul it is necessary that we know something about these things. Europe has grown splendidly in literature and art, and an intellectual understanding and appreciation of her books and pictures and music and statues will be a magnificent help to us in the unfolding of our own Indian consciousness. A detached study of them and not a wholesale incorporation of them in our own life and work should be our aim. We have our own contribution to make to the world, and our goal certainly should not be to be mere copyists of the West. Imitators, at their very best are but poor creatures; however simple or humble may it be, if we could give something of our own to the world, it would

be grateful for it, and we should have achieved our task.

A Dream

And now let me close. The transitional stage of Indian Nationalism is coming to an end. A New Age is upon us in this world-old country of ours. It is like the Return of Shri Ramachandra to the City of Ayodhya. For centuries our India, bereft of her real Ruler—her own people—has been living on in silent sorrow. Her weary toil and as weary waiting are coming to an end. Bharat Mata, like Ramachandraji, is arriving in the Pushpa chariot, and a million jocund voices shout joyously her name.

> Women with their loving greetings, children with their joyous cry,
> Tottering age and lisping infant hailed the righteous chief and high.

And the freedom-loving Briton, like Bharat of old, will say to our Mother: "Faithful to my trust and duty, I render back to thee thine own."

Shall our progress, our soul-unfoldment, be such as to fulfil the description of Rama's

reign? It will depend on us, my brothers, and we, the sons and daughters of India, must continuously worship that Ideal King, and aspire as He aspired, and do as He did and feel as He felt, and think as He thought; and by sacrifice, by the memory kept alive of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, by forgiving the sinful, and forgetting the evil, by serving all around us, we will bring our beloved Motherland, in the years to come, to repeat the charm and prosperity of Ramachandra's Ayodhya. Here it is:

> And 'tis told by ancient sages, during Rama's happy reign,
>
> Death untimely, dire dieases, come not to his subject men,
>
> Widows wept not in their sorrow for their lords untimely lost,
>
> Mothers wailed not in their anguish for their babes by Yama crcst,
>
> Robbers, cheats, and gay deceivers tempted not with lying word,
>
> Neighbour loved his righteous neighbour and the people loved their lord!
>
> Trees their ample produce yielded as returning seasons went,
>
> And the earth in grateful gladness never failing harvest lent,

Rains descended in their season, never came
the blighting gale,
Rich in crop and rich in pasture was each soft
and smiling vale,
Loom and anvil gave their produce and the
tilled and fertile soil,
And the nation lived rejoicing in their old
ancestral toil.

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